

Message Text

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62/46L
ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 2730
INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 6768

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - T E X T

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, TH, KN
SUBJECT: THAI-NORTH KOREAN RELATIONS

REF: STATE 83975 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: THE MFA SPOKESMAN EXPLAINED THE NORTH KOREAN VISIT AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE THAI POLICY OF READINESS TO BE FRIENDS WITH ALL COUNTRIES THAT SHOW FRIENDSHIP TOWARD THAILAND. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID PUBLICLY THAT THE CABINET SAW NO OBSTACLE TO THE VISIT. MFA OFFICIALS HAVE INDICATED TO US PRIVATELY THAT THEY SEE NO THREAT TO THE FLOURISHING TRADE BETWEEN THAILAND AND SOUTH KOREA, AND HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT LOCAL ROK OBJECTIONS TO THE VISIT CENTER ON THE LACK OF RECIPROCITY OF COMMUNIST COUNTRIES TOWARD RELATIONS WITH THE ROK. WE SEE NO EARLY PROSPECT FOR EXTENSIVE THAI TRADE WITH NORTH KOREA. NOW THAT EXCHANGES ARE UNDERWAY WITH CHINA AND NORTH KOREA, THAILAND PROBABLY HOPES TO ATTRACT NORTH VIETNAM TO FOLLOW SUIT. WE RECOMMEND THAT ASSISTANT SECRETARY INGERSOLL GIVE NO ENCOURAGEMENT TO ANTICIPATED ROK REQUESTS THAT WE INTERVENE WITH THE THAI TO DISCOURAGE THIS INITIATIVE.

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1. PRACHA KUNAKASEM, SPOKESMAN OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MFA) HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE APRIL 25. FOLLOWING IS AN OFFICIAL USIS TRANSLATION OF HIS REMARKS ON THE NORTH KOREAN VISIT;

"REGARDING THE VISIT TO THAILAND OF A GROUP OF REPRESENTATIVES OF NORTH KOREA, THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE WILL BE THE HOST WELCOMING THEM. INFORMATION WE HAVE RECEIVED NOW IS THAT THEY WILL LEAVE KARACHI AND ARRIVE IN BANGKOK ON APRIL 26, TOMORROW, AT MIDDAY, BY SAS PLANE.

"THE LEADER OF THE PARTY IS MR. KYE UNG TAI, MINISTER OF FOREIGN TRADE OF NORTH KOREA. THE 4 OTHER MEMBERS OF HIS PARTY ARE: MR. RYU YOUNG GAK, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE NORTH KOREAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS; MR. BAK SU GWON, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE NORTH KOREAN FOREIGN TRADE MINISTRY; MR. CHO KYU-IL, DIRECTOR OF THE NORTH KOREAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS; AND MR. BAE GYONG RAK, COMMERCIAL COUNSELOR OF THE NORTH KOREAN EMBASSY IN CAIRO. THEY WILL BE HERE ABOUT 5 DAYS AT THE LONGEST.

"I WISH TO FURTHER INFORM YOU THAT WE REGARD THIS VISIT FROM THE ANGLE OF GOODWILL BECAUSE NORTH KOREA HAS SHOWN ITS GOOD INTENTIONS IN VARIOUS WAYS AND SEVERAL TIMES ALREADY. THIS IS THE REASON WHY WE HAVE OKAYED THIS REQUEST FOR THIS PARTY TO COME AND VISIT THAILAND. FURTHERMORE, IT COORDINATES WITH THE POLICY WE HAVE PROCLAIMED THAT THAILAND IS READY TO BE FRIENDS WITH ALL COUNTRIES THAT SHOW FRIENDSHIP TOWARD US. NORTH KOREA HAS DISPLAYED THIS FRIENDLY ATTITUDE TOWARD US MANY TIMES, IN MANY PLACES AND IN MANY WAYS. I HOWEVER WISH TO DENY THE REPORT PUBLISHED IN SOME NEWSPAPERS THAT CONTACT WAS MADE THROUGH THE CHINESE AMBASSADOR WITH THE THAI AMBASSADOR IN ISLAMABAD. THE TRUTH IS THAT THE NORTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR MADE DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE THAI AMBASSADOR IN ISLAMABAD".

2. PRIME MINISTER SANYA THAMMASAK HELD A NEWS CONFERENCE THE PREVIOUS DAY. FOLLOWING IS AN OFFICIAL USIS TRANSLATION OF HIS REMARKS ON THE SAME TOPIC:
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" THE CABINET WAS OF THE VIEW THAT THERE IS NO OBSTACLE AT ALL BECAUSE IT IS OUR FOREIGN POLICY TO BE FRIENDS WITH ALL COUNTRIES THAT ARE NO DANGER TO US..."

REPORTER: "WILL CONTACTS WITH NORTH KOREA BE SIMILAR TO OUR CONTACTS WITH CHINA? WHAT I MEAN IS WHETHER THERE WILL BE SPORTS CONTACTS, CULTURAL CONTACTS, ETC., BUT

NO DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WILL BE ESTABLISHED YET?

SANYA: "AT THIS STAGE THE NORTH KOREAN MINISTER OF
FOREIGN TRADE WISHES TO COME HERE IN ORDER TO HOLD TALKS
CONCERNING TRADE CONTACTS WITH US. WE HAVE NOT SENT ANYBODY
TO NORTH KOREA AS WE SENT TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF
CHINA, WHERE WE SENT SPORTS TEAMS FIRST, THEN WE SENT
REPRESENTATIVES TO BUY OIL FROM IT. BUT NORTH KOREA HAS
TAKEN THE INITIATIVE IN SENDING REPRESENTATIVES HERE.
REPORTER: "DOES THAT MEAN THAT CONTACTS WITH NORTH
KOREA IN THE FUTURE WILL BE SIMILAR TO OUR CONTACTS
WITH CHINA?"

SANYA: "CONTACTS MUST NOT BE DAMAGING; THERE MUST
BE NO POLITICS INVOLVED IN CONTACTS MADE.

REPORTER: "THE STATEMENT ISSUED ON THE CABINET
MEETING YESTERDAY SAID THAT THIS VISIT IS IN ORDER TO PAVE
THE WAY FOR TRADE AND FOR RELATIONS IN THE FUTURE
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5. THE LOCAL PRESS HAS REPORTED EXTREME ROK EMBASSY
AGITATION OVER THE DELEGATION'S IMPENDING ARRIVAL. THE
FIRST MFA OFFICIAL TOLD US THAT THE ROK OBJECTIONS CENTERED
ON THE LACK OF RECIPROCITY BY COMMUNIST COUNTRIES TOWARD
RELATIONS WITH THE ROK. WE MADE THE POINT WITH THE SECOND
MFA OFFICIAL THAT IT WOULD BE NICE IF COUNTRIES LIKE THE
SOVIET UNION WERE MORE RECEPTIVE TO SOUTH KOREAN
OVERTURES, BUT UNDERLINED THAT THAILAND AND THE U.S.
SEEMED TO BE HEADING IN THE SAME DIRECTION OF BREAKING
THE ICE WITH OUR FORMER ENEMIES.

6. COMMENT: IF THE NORTH KOREAN VISIT GOES SMOOTHLY, AND THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE IT WON'T FROM EVERY LOCAL STANDPOINT BUT THAT IF THE SOUTH KOREAN EMBASSY IN BANGKOK, WE WOULD EXPECT ANY TRADE ARRANGEMENTS TO GET OFF TO A SLOW START. PROSPECTS APPEAR LIMITED IN ANY EVENT, AND CONFINED MAINLY TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND SOME MINERALS.

7. THE RTG HAS SEVERAL OBJECTIVES IN WELCOMING A NORTH KOREAN TRADE DELEGATION TO BANGKOK. THIS MOVE IS IN LINE WITH RECENT THAI EFFORTS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY HAVE AN "INDEPENDENT" FOREIGN POLICY AND DO NOT FOLLOW THE U.S. OR ANYONE ELSE. THE THAI MAY ALSO HOPE TO USE
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THE NORTH KOREAN VISIT TO PRESSURE THE ROK TO EASE ITS TRADE TERMS. MORE BROADLY, IN AN ERA OF DETENTE, THE RTG IS TAKING A LEAF FROM THE U.S. BOOK IN TRYING TO TALK WITH ITS FORMER OPPONENTS. NORTH VIETNAM, HOWEVER, IS THE REAL NUT THAT THAILAND WOULD LIKE TO CRACK. THE OPENING TO CHINA, WHICH HAS BEEN DEVELOPING FOR OVER A YEAR, PLUS THESE CURRENT RESPONSES TO NORTH KOREAN OVERTURES, HAVE AN OBJECTIVE, THAT MAY BE MORE THAN SECONDARY, OF INDICATING TO NORTH VIETNAM THAT IT TOO COULD FOLLOW SUIT. FOR OVER A GENERAL THE RTG HAS HOPED TO EVICT ALL ITS NORTH VIETNAMESE REFUGEES WHOM IT REGARDS, NOT ALTOGETHER CORRECTLY, AS SUBVERSIVES. THE RTG THINKS THAT NORMALIZING RELATIONS WITH NORTH VIETNAM, OR AT LEAST ENTERING INTO A DIALOGUE, MIGHT SPEED THEIR DEPARTURE. IN THE INTEREST OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STABILITY, THAILAND WOULD ADDITIONALLY LIKE TO SEE A LESS BELLICOSE NORTH VIETNAM THAT WOULD PARTICIPATE IN SUCH REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AS ASEAN.

8. REF A DOES NOT SUGGEST ANY DEMARCHE THAT WE SHOULD MAKE IN WASHINGTON OR BANGKOK TO DISCOURAGE THE RTG FROM OPENING THE DOOR TO NORTH KOREA. WE BELIEVE ANY SUCH ACTION BY US WOULD BE A MISTAKE. THE THAI HAVE THEIR OWN REASONS FOR PROCEEDING SLOWLY IN ANY RELATIONSHIP WITH NORTH KOREA, JUST AS THEY ARE MOVING GLACIALLY WITH THE PRC. THEY WOULD RESENT OUR INTERVENTION, AND WOULD QUICKLY REITERATE THAT WE OPENED OUR DIALOGUE WITH PEKING AND HANOI WITHOUT CONSULTING THEM.

9. RECOMMENDED ACTION: WE WOULD THUS RECOMMEND THAT ASSISTANT SECRETARY INGERSOLL GIVE ENCOURAGEMENT TO ANTICIPATED ROK REQUESTS THAT WE INTERVENE WITH THE THAI TO DISCOURAGE AN IMPROVEMENT IN THAI/NORTH KOREAN RELATIONS. WE WOULD SUGGEST THAT HE QUOTE SANYA AND PRACHA ON THIS SUBJECT, AND CONFIDENTIALLY MENTION OUR

ASSEMSSMENT THAT THE THAI ARE POLITICALLY SOPHISTICATED
ENOUGH TO BE AWARE OF THE POLITICAL DANGERS OF A PERMANENT
NORTH KOREAN PRESENCE. HE MIGHT ALSO MENTION THAT TRADE
PROSPECTS WITH THE DPRK AND CURRENTLY SLIGHT IN RELATION
TO THOSE WITH THE ROK, AND THAT THE THAI HAVE NO
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PATTERN OF MOVING PRECIPITOUSLY IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

10. IN THE APRIL 26 MEETING WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER,
THE AMBASSADOR WILL FIND OUT WHAT HE CAN ABOUT THE
NORTHKOREAN VISIT.
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